

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE L-AWASHINGTON TIMES
13 November 1985

Top aide warns on Philippine voting

By James Morrison
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The upcoming presidential election in the politically troubled Philippines "will be harmful" if the winning candidate encourages "business-as-usual attitudes or fosters the illusion" that a growing communist insurgency "will disappear on its own," a top State Department official warned yesterday.

The remarks by Assistant Secretary of State Paul Wolfowitz at a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee hearing underscores the Reagan administration's recent warnings to President Ferdinand Marcos, who has defended his government and discounted U.S. estimates of communist strength.

Many observers believe the Filipino business community is ridden with corruption from the president's political cronies. They say the military desperately needs reforms and that the government is totally controlled by Mr. Marcos.

President Marcos, who has ruled the Philippines for 20 years including nine years of martial law, recently called for a presidential election and announced he will run for a fourth term.

In an interview on NBC last night, Mr. Marcos said he has "definitely" ruled out naming his wife as his vice presidential candidate.

He also said he would not invite foreign election commissions to observe the voting.

Asked why his political opponents express fear that he will rig the elections to ensure his re-election, President Marcos responded, "They're probably preparing for defeat."

In another television interview, he said the communists are "surrendering in droves."

However, U.S. intelligence reports estimate communist strength is growing rapidly, with about 15,000 guerrillas now operating in up to 62 of the nation's 73 provinces.

Last month, acting Foreign Minister Pacifico Castro told a Washington audience that Filipinos will solve their own problems without outside interference.

"The main responsibility for resolving our own problems is ... ours and ours alone," Mr. Castro said, emphasizing several political and economic reforms made by Mr. Marcos.

But U.S. officials, like Mr. Wolfowitz and Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Armitage, yesterday repeated the administration's grave concern for the Philippines, a key U.S. ally in the western Pacific and home of the two largest American military bases outside the United States.

Mr. Armitage, who also testified before the subcommittee, said the communist New People's Army is growing so strong that "a strategic stalemate, which will likely lead to communist domination, appears likely within three to five years."

Mr. Wolfowitz, countering claims of reform, said that the "pace and substance

of the economic, political and military reforms implemented has been disappointing.

"Military abuses of civilians continue, particularly in areas where there are regular counterinsurgency operations,"

He also warned against the reinstatement of Gen. Fabian Ver, chief of the Philippines armed forces who is charged along with 24 others in the 1983 assassination of Benigno Aquino, a leading opponent of Mr. Marcos who was shot as he returned to Manila.

Mr. Marcos has promised to reinstate the general, a close personal friend, if he is acquitted.

Mr. Wolfowitz said the upcoming election, expected Jan. 17, "will be harmful if it encourages the continuation of business as usual attitudes or fosters the illusion that the communist danger will disappear on its own."

"If Filipinos in the end do not see the elections as a reasonably democratic exercise, such a perception will lead to the increased polarization of Philippine society, a deepening of the present crisis and further growth of the communist insurgency," he said.